

[59. *Puffinus yelkouanus* Acerbi.

Flocks of these "Lost Souls" or *Yelkovan* were to be seen constantly passing up or down the Bosphorus. The people of Constantinople commonly suppose that they never alight on the water.]

60. ? *Podiceps fluviatilis* Tunstall.

"Plenty of small Grebes" were seen on the pond at Kumbet, July 7.

XXI. *Notes from Mesopotamia.*

By Capt. R. MEINERTZHAGEN, M.B.O.U.

(Text-figure 7.)

A FEW notes on the birds observed during a trip up the Tigris in January, 1914, may be of interest to readers of 'The Ibis.'

Though the list of birds which were seen must not in any way be considered exhaustive, it will give any future traveller in these regions an idea of what he may expect to find in Mesopotamia during the winter months.

Entering the Shat-el-Arab at Fao, I travelled up by river-boat to Bagdad, whence a visit was paid to Babylon and Kerbela. Mosul was visited by carriage, and the return journey to Bagdad made by raft, and thence by river-boat to Basra and Mohammerah.

Though the trip was of short duration, I had exceptional opportunities for observing bird-life both in the desert and on the river.

A fact which was noticed at the start was the European character of the birds seen, scarcely any being purely Asiatic. Again, nearly all birds seen were migrants from the north. The Tigris at Mosul is about 200 yards wide, with frequent sandy islands. In places the river broadens out to half a mile, with marshes on either side, whilst about Tekrit the river passes through low hills, which confine it to a rapid

flowing bed with high banks. At Sheremieh the river again broadens out and flows through level plains to the sea. From Amara to Kurna, the Tigris passes through vast

Text-fig. 7.



Sketch-map of Mesopotamia to show the localities visited by Capt. Meinertzhagen.

marshes and reed swamps, and from Kurna to Fao the banks are low and covered with date gardens.

Except for the date-palms, no woods of any sort exist. Occasional patches of dwarf poplar and tamarisk are met with, and on the river-banks there is a little cultivation, but

elsewhere one finds an expanse of rich uncultivated soil, that only requires water to convert desert to the ancient Garden of Eden. Around Mosul the country becomes hilly, and carpeted with short crisp grass, broken at intervals by outcrops of white gypsum.

Of Passerine birds, the Corvidæ are well represented. The Raven (*Corvus corax*) was seen as far south as Kut and was fairly abundant near Tekrit and Mosul, but never in flocks. It was shy, and not so tame as the large flocks of these birds, which visit India every cold weather. The Hooded Crow (*C. cornix*) is abundant from Fao to Bagdad. Farther north it becomes scarcer, and none were seen at Mosul. The farther south these birds were seen, the whiter became their mantle. Some seen at Basra appeared pure black and white, the latter having a faint pink tinge. This variety (*C. capellanus*) was never observed north of Bagdad, whilst only one of the ashy-grey mantled birds was noticed south of Bagdad. Rooks (*C. frugilegus*) were in enormous flocks from Bagdad northwards, and a few were seen between Kut and Amara. A large flock of Jackdaws (*C. monedula*) was seen at Mosul, but none elsewhere. Magpies (*Pica rustica*) are common around Bagdad, Babylon, Kerbela, and northwards, and are extremely tame. They can frequently be seen perched on camels' backs.

The White-eared Bulbul (*Molpastes leucotis*) is very common at Mohammerah and Basra, and a few were seen at Bagdad and Babylon. The Allied Grey Shrike (*Lanius assimilis*) was seen at Sheremielh on Jan. 16, and several Finsch's Grey Shrikes (*L. fallax*) were noted on the lower Tigris near Kurna.

Gouid's Starling (*Sturnus purpurascens*) was everywhere abundant and roosts in vast flocks in the marshes of the lower Tigris.

I had hoped to see many sorts of Chat, as the country is so eminently suited to them, but only the Wheatear (*Saxicola ænanthe*) was noted, and it was scarce around Babylon and Tekrit. Among the ruins of Babylon, Nineveh, and

Assur (Shergat) the Black Redstart (*Ruticilla titys*) was common, whilst a solitary Robin (*Erithacus rubecula*) was seen in some tamarisk scrub near Mosul.

The Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) is common everywhere, and the Rock Sparrow (*Petronia stulta*) was observed in the hills around Mosul. A small flock of Goldfinches (*Carduelis elegans*) was seen at Bagdad on Jan. 2, and Chaffinches (*Fringilla cœlebs*) were noticed at Tekrit and Mosul. There was a small flock of Linnets at Nineveh, but whether they were *Acanthis cannabina* or *A. fringillirostris*, I am unable to say. The Pine Bunting (*Emberiza leucocephala*) was seen just north of Bagdad, and a solitary Ortolan (*E. hortulana*) was noticed at Mosul.

The Pied (*Motacilla lugubris*) and White (*M. alba*) Wagtails were plentiful throughout, the latter being the commoner of the two in Basra and Mohammerah. I saw an undoubted Grey Wagtail (*M. melanope*) at Bagdad, and a few Black-headed Wagtail (*M. melanocephala*) on the river between that place and Mosul. Several Pipits were noticed, but their identification was uncertain. The Crested Lark (*Galerita cristata*) is very common from Mohammerah to Mosul, and can frequently be seen on the flat earth-roofs of houses. The Skylark (*Alauda arvensis*) was everywhere in large flocks, but never away from cultivation.

Of the Picariæ, a solitary Roller, probably *Coracias garrula*, was seen sitting on a telegraph wire near Amara, and Kingfishers of three varieties were observed. The Pied Kingfisher (*Ceryle rudis*) extends from Fao to Mosul, and as many as eleven were counted together at one time. Several Common Kingfisher (*Alcedo ispida*) were seen at Basra and in the marshes near Kurna, whilst the White-breasted Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*) is plentiful at Basra and Mohammerah, where its noisy call is commonly heard in the date gardens.

The Southern Little Owl (*Athene glaux*), conspicuous by its light colour, was plentiful along the river-bank and in the ruined cities of Babylon and Assur, whilst at the former

place an Eagle Owl (*Bubo ignavus*) blinked at me from the ruins of the Tower of Babel.

Of the Accipitres, the Vultures appeared to be rare. One Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*) was seen near Bagdad, some large Vultures were noticed at a great height near Mosul, and a small lot, probably *Gyps fulvus*, were found roosting in a palm grove near Amara. The Imperial Eagle (*Aquila heliaca*), Pallas's Sea Eagle (*Haliaëtus leucoryphus*), and the White-tailed Sea Eagle (*H. albicilla*) were observed, the two latter species being common on the upper reaches of the Tigris. Four Spotted Eagles (*A. maculata*) were seen near Tekrit, and a few in the marshes near Kurna. Two large Hawks were noted near Mosul, which I think were Bonelli's Eagle (*Hieraëtus fasciatus*). The Arabs are well acquainted with this Eagle, and prize it very much for hawking gazelle and hares. Buzzards (*Buteo ferox* and *B. vulgaris*) were numerous throughout and showed great diversity of plumage, some of the former species being almost creamy white on the head and body. Montagu's (*Circus cineraceus*), Hen (*C. cyaneus*) and Marsh Harriers (*C. æruginosus*), in all varieties of plumage, haunted the marshes and sandpits. But few Falcons were observed. They were probably all Peregrine (*Falco peregrinus*) and Barbary Falcons (*F. barbarus*), as only these two species were seen in the hands of Arab falconers. At both Bagdad and Mosul falconry is indulged in by the richer Arabs. At the latter place the Great Bustard is the favourite quarry, but I was informed that it affords poor sport.

Ospreys (*Pandion haliaëtus*) were occasionally observed throughout the route, but appeared uncommon, and were certainly the most wary of all the Hawks seen. Sparrow-hawks (*Accipiter nisus*) were abundant in and around Bagdad and Mohammerah. They doubtless occur throughout the date-palm area. Black Kites (*Milvus migrans*) were very plentiful everywhere, being occasionally seen in large flocks. Near Amara a cream-coloured Kite was among a flock of *Milvus migrans*, and differed from them only in colour.

Kestrels (*Tinnunculus alaudarius*) were by far the commonest Hawk seen, being particularly fond of the high river-banks near Tekrit. Their shrill cries could be heard in every ruin, as they circled round the great hall of Nebuchadnezzar at Babylon, or under the massive Parthian arch of Ctesiphon.

The Rock Pigeon (*Columba livia*) is plentiful both in the towns and on the desert. All the large mosques form roosting places for these birds, and at Kerbela many thousands could be seen any evening on the golden dome of Hussein's Mosque. Doves, mostly *Turtur risorius*, frequented the date groves of Basra, Bagdad, and Kerbela.

Two species of Sandgrouse were observed. The Large Black-bellied Sandgrouse (*Pterocles arenarius*) was noticed near Babylon and Samarra, whilst a large flock of Pin-tailed Sandgrouse (*Pteroclorus alchata*) was seen amongst the ruins of Assur.

Black Partridge (*Francolinus vulgaris*) are found from Mohammerah to Mosul in suitable places, and can frequently be seen from the river-boat. The Chukor (*Caccabis chukar*) was seen at Nineveh and among the rocky hills near Mosul, and a brace of Quail (*Coturnix communis*) on an island near Tekrit. Seesee (*Ammoperdix bonhami*) are very plentiful among the ruins of Assur, where large bags have been made, and we saw a large covey on the river-bank a few miles north of Samarra.

Coot (*Fulica atra*) occurred in suitable localities, but never in large quantities.

Great Bustard (*Otis tarda*) seemed fairly plentiful around Mosul, for we saw two lots of seven and fifteen respectively near that place. This species has been killed as far south as Bagdad.

Of Waders, many were seen and but few identified. The Plover (*Vanellus vulgaris*) was well distributed, whilst many Cream-coloured Coursers (*Cursorius gallicus*) were seen on the desert near Babylon and Bagdad. The Red-wattled Plover (*Sarcogrammus indicus*) seemed scarce, only three lots being seen, all north of Bagdad. One large lot of Curlew

(*Numenius arquata*) was noted near Tekrit, and a solitary Avocet (*Recurvirostra avocetta*) adorned a sandspit near Bagdad. Of other Waders the following were identified :—

Redshank (*Totanus calidris*).

Green Sandpiper (*T. ochropus*).

Common Sandpiper (*T. hypoleucus*).

Dunlin (*Tringa alpina*).

Little Stint (*T. minuta*).

Curlew Sandpiper (*T. subarquata*).

Snipe are plentiful near Basra and Mohammerah in the winter, whilst a Woodcock (*Scolopax rusticola*) was killed at Bagdad some years ago.

A noticeable feature of travelling up the Tigris is the quantity of Gulls that follow the boat. At Mohammerah and Basra the Black-headed Gull (*Larus ridibundus*) is abundant, but was not seen north of Kurna. The Dark-backed Herring Gull (*L. affinis*) was seen on the Shat-el-Arab and on the Tigris as far north as Amara. A few Yellow-legged Herring Gulls (*L. cachinnans*) were seen at Fao and Basra, and were the only Gulls at and north of Bagdad. They were also frequently seen far from the river, scouring the desert for food. A Tern, usually singly or in pairs, was occasionally seen on the Tigris between Basra and Bagdad. I was unable to identify the species.

No river scene in Mesopotamia would be complete without the Pelican, probably *Pelecanus onocrotalus*. It is particularly tame in these parts, and in the middle of the day one can frequently pass within a few yards of a party of them asleep on a sandy island, as one silently floats down stream on a raft.

However out of the way of water, and no matter how far from the sea, there will be found the Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*). Mesopotamia is no exception, and this bird was found the whole length of the river. It is remarkable how it catches its food in such a muddy river as the Tigris, which is a dark brown in colour and which contains five

times as much silt as the Nile. A human being cannot see half an inch through Tigris water, and yet we frequently saw both Cormorant and Kingfisher emerging from the river with fish. One Shag (*P. graculus*) was seen near Tekrit. It was a very old bird, and I was very surprised to find this species so far east and so far from the sea.

The Common Heron (*Ardea cinerea*) was seen everywhere in suitable localities. A large flock of Spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia*) was seen feeding on some mud flats near Samarra, and in the marshes near Amara large quantities of Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*) could be seen feeding and flying about in the evening light.

During the voyage up the Tigris at the end of Dec. 1913, no White Stork (*Ciconia alba*) was seen, but on the return journey we first met with it at Samarra on Jan. 27, when two were seen sitting on the golden dome of the mosque at that place, whilst on Feb. 2 large numbers of these birds were noticed in the marshes of the lower Tigris. They apparently nest in numbers in Mesopotamia, and there are few mosques or minarets without a Stork's nest on it. In Mosul this was particularly noticeable, whilst even Jonah's tomb at Nineveh was not considered too sacred for an enormous pile of sticks and rubbish.

There is probably no place in the world where wildfowl of all descriptions congregate in larger numbers during the winter months than in the marshes of the Tigris and Euphrates. On the former river, a vast expanse of reed and marsh on either bank is sometimes black with duck. In the middle of the day many thousands of unapproachable geese can be seen sitting on some island sandspit or on the flat edge of some expanse of water, whilst in the evening the air is alive with duck and teal fighting in the decreasing light, and skein after skein of geese wend their noisy way to their feeding grounds.

Among the Anatidæ identified were:—

Grey Lag Geese (*Anser ferus*). Plentiful.

Common Sheldrake (*Tadorna canuta*). Three seen.

Ruddy Sheldrake (*Casarca rutila*). Fairly common.
Mallard (*Anas boschas*). Plentiful.
Teal (*Nettion crecca*). Plentiful.
Wigeon (*Mareca penelope*). A few seen.
Pintail (*Dafila acuta*). Fairly plentiful.
Common Pochard (*Nyroca ferina*). Plentiful.
Tufted Pochard (*Nyroca fuligula*). A few seen.
Golden-eye (*Clangula glaucion*). Fairly plentiful.
Smew (*Mergus albellus*). Only one seen.
Goosander (*Merganser castor*). Fairly common.

Only one species of Grebe was seen, and it appeared abundant in the marshes and back-waters of the Tigris from Fao to Mosul, but whether it was *Podiceps albipennis* or *P. fluviatilis* I am unable to say.

XXII.—*A Note on the Common Ringed Plover of the British Isles* (*Charadrius hiaticola major* Seebohm), and on Coloration as a Factor in Generic Differentiation. By PERCY R. LOWE, M.B.O.U.

It is rather a remarkable fact that in spite of the exceedingly close scrutiny to which every British species has of late been subjected, with a view to detect any evidence of differentiation which may obtain between it and the corresponding forms located on the continent—the case of the Common Ringed Plover has been entirely overlooked, or perhaps, to speak more correctly, ignored.

Thus, if one refers to the latest 'Handlist of British Birds,' compiled under the joint authority of Messrs. Hartert, Jourdain, Ticehurst, and Witherby, one finds the Common Ringed Plover of the British Isles designated as *Charadrius hiaticola hiaticola* Linn., while in the synonymy of this species we get the following note:—" *Charadrius hiaticola major* Seebohm, Hist. Brit. B. iii. p. 20 (1885)—